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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 0513
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EAP/J FOR YANG, NEA/RA FOR SHAUNFIELD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SI](#) [AL](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: JAPAN'S PARTICIPATION AT DAMASCUS ARAB LEAGUE
SUMMIT

REF: A. TOKYO 779

[1](#)B. STATE 28407

[1](#)C. 07 TOKYO 3078

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)
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[1](#)1. (C) Japan's Special Envoy for the Middle East, Ambassador Tatsuo Arima, is planning to attend the Arab Summit meeting March 29-30 in Damascus as an observer, confirmed MOFA First Middle East Division Principal Deputy Director Akihiro Tsuji.

Per ref B, Embassy Tokyo political officer told Tsuji that we hope Arima reconsiders his decision, as his presence at the summit will be used by the Syrian regime to demonstrate to its people and others that Syria is not being isolated as a result of its policies in the region. Also mentioned was the fact that some Arab countries and international organizations, including the United Nations and European Union, are sending lower level delegations to the meeting. Finally, political officer noted that Japan International Cooperation Agency President Sadako Ogata visited Damascus just last week despite our protests, and a photograph of her meeting with President al-Asad had appeared on the front page of the Syrian Times (ref A).

[1](#)2. (C) Tsuji replied that he understands our point of view and will convey our message to First Middle East Division Director Masahiro Mikami, Middle East Bureau Director General Norihiro Okuda, and to Ambassador Arima. However, his personal opinion is that Ambassador Arima will opt to attend.

He said that large multilateral meetings of Middle Eastern countries provide Arima with a good opportunity to meet individually with a number of important regional leaders at one time, an important factor given the distance to the region and Arima's age. Although no meetings have yet been confirmed, Tsuji said Arima has requested bilaterals with Jordan's King Abdallah and the Palestinian Authority's President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad.

[1](#)3. (C) Tsuji said he had heard that some Arab countries are downgrading their delegations due to pique over Syria's policies in Lebanon and the wider region, but said he understood that United Nations Secretary General Ban ki-Moon is planning to attend the meeting, and asked for information on who from the European Union plans to go. He seemed to be unaware of the fact that Ogata's photo with Asad had appeared in the Syrian media. Tsuji also noted that following Arima's

visit to Damascus, he plans to travel to Washington where he has requested meetings with Deputy Secretary Negroponte and NEA Assistant Secretary Welch.

14. (C) COMMENT: We believe it would be helpful to reinforce this demarche in Washington and recommend the matter be discussed with the Japanese Embassy there. If Arima cannot be persuaded to reconsider, then perhaps he should be provided with some talking points we'd like him to make. Embassy reminds Department that in addition to Ogata's recent visit to Damascus, Senior Vice Minister Katsuhito Asano traveled there last June and met with Asad despite our demarches (ref C). Finally, if Arima does go, and if he subsequently has meetings in the Department, perhaps it would be a good time to press him again for tangible support and material assistance for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.
END COMMENT.
SCHIEFFER